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The spy who's out in the cold

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Peter James went from siphoning secrets from Russian scientists for the Central Intelligence Agency to blowing the whistle on questionable United States Air Force intelligence activities and is still around to tell about it.

The one-time aerospace engineer turned spy turned ex-spy appeared at Kankakee Community College Monday, relating a real-life 007 story in which he played a leading role.

James, now 37, got caught up in international espionage during the mid-1960s when he was an engineer and propulsion expert with Pratt & Whitney Aircraft. Now he is bent on reducing government corruption. Already he has authored two books and a series of newspaper stories on his experiences.

It was the association James developed with Soviet scientists during an international space conference held at Athens, Greece, in 1965 that first attracted the CIA's interest.

When he returned from the trip, a CIA agent made a "convincing pitch" for James' cooperation after future conferences. If he would submit to debriefing and questioning, the CIA could gain valuable information.



JAMES

James agreed to the proposal, certain, he explained, that it was in the national interest for him to learn what he could about Russian technological advances and relay that information to the American side.

"Our country really had to know what was going on behind the Iron Curtain in the areas of space technology and missiles," said James.

In the ensuing years he and his wife would journey to Europe and South America to participate in the conferences. He developed a close association with top Russian scientists with whom the couple talked and drank — and photographed extensively. Judging from James' anecdotes, the conferences were steeped in cloak and dagger mystique.

Upon his return, he would prepare lengthy intelligence reports. Any information gained from the Soviets was valuable, he said, because so little technological data leaks out from their closed society.

"With the Russians, just about everything they tell you is something you don't already know and it's the job of the analyst to determine whether you are being told the truth or not," he said.

Russians was his patriotic duty and he is proud of what he did. His second book, "Soviet Conquest from Space," details what James calls tremendous Russian efforts towards the military usage of space-age technology.

It was later, after the Air Force stepped in, that in his eyes the spy business began to go sour.

He states that the Air Force Foreign Technology Division stationed at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio, approached the management of the Pratt & Whitney research center in Florida, to ask the company to evaluate Russian technological intelligence for the government. James was named the foreign technology coordinator for Pratt-Whitney.

"So there was a time in my career when I was a rocket engineer collecting intelligence for the CIA overseas and analyzing intelligence for the United States Air Force. This was really a unique position," he observed, adding that it is one his former employer, the CIA and the Air Force now regret having created.

On one hand, said James, through some "slip up," he never signed a secrecy oath, which could have legally prevented him from revealing what he knew in the future.

On the other hand, he was both collecting and analyzing intelligence, something generally unheard of in the spy game, where it is often noted that the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. From this vantage point he began to witness "questionable intelligence activities."

James said he knew a man in another branch of Pratt & Whitney who began contradicting intelligence reports he believed the Air Force had fabricated — reports heavily depended on by the executive branch of the federal government. The Air Force demanded the man be taken off the job or the company would suffer.

James described instances when the Air Force engaged in industrial espionage between U.S. companies and also disseminated technological information to the advantage of companies who were close with the military complex.

One Air Force agent told him, "In this business, laws don't mean a damn thing." He also heard talk of an Air Force "hit" squad.

"In 1969, in my little world down in Florida, I knew that something was wrong. It seemed that in the name of national security, the laws of our country no longer meant anything," he said.

He decided he had to choose between what was more important, national security or individual liberties. He picked the latter. Soon the word was out that James was very up-